

‘Making the Archives Talk’: Towards an Electronic Edition of Joseph Furphy’s *Such is Life*

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Joseph Furphy’s *Such is Life* is widely regarded as ‘one of the great masterpieces and challenges of Australian literature’ (Goldsworthy 108), an icon of the nation’s cultural heritage. But, in Hershel Parker’s terms, no novel exists as a ‘verbal icon’, offering readers a stable, definitive version of a writer’s literary production. The first edition of *Such is Life*, published in 1903 by the Bulletin Publishing Company, was the last step in a protracted period of composition, revision, and correction that produced several legitimate versions that are visible among the fragments of extant manuscripts and typescripts. As Julian Croft has argued, the revisions were influenced by a new sense of audience, and were executed under pressure from the publisher. Ultimately, this changed the book’s ‘centre of gravity’, leaving a version in the extant typescript that ‘was more concerned with the relationships of men and women, and far more concerned with the notions of art, artifice, realism, and romance’ (Croft 61).

When Furphy died on 13 September 1912, the possibility of any further authorial changes to his published and unpublished work died with him. His death did not stop publishing initiatives abridging his works by commissioning editors to do the job, and it did not stop the loss of unpublished material as family members dealt with the author’s papers in the best way they could. Much was saved by Furphy’s friends and supporters and this material was eventually deposited in the special collections of several libraries and archives, preserving a fragmented record of the life and work of a man who maintains a prominent position in Australia’s literary history. As recent theory has demonstrated, the compilation and interpretation of the archive is unavoidably subjective, and so the contingencies of historical and critical interpretation form a very unstable view of the past. It is the job of a scholarly editor to confront this instability and provide a representation of the work that is useful to future enquiry.

In this article I describe one approach, among several legitimate options, that I believe is the best way to represent, for current and future readers of Australian literature, the complicated and fragmented condition of the work we know as *Such is Life*. Informed by recent arguments in editorial theory and inspired by the possibilities of delivery in digital formats, an electronic edition of Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* will provide greater access to the major elements of the extant archival record, and provide an environment where readers can contribute to the edition with annotations and commentary. Unlike the closed format of print-based alternatives, the electronic edition will remain open to critique, correction and debate, providing an environment that better accommodates the contingencies of archival preservation and historical interpretation.

The Growth of the Archive

For the purposes of this article the scope of my discussion is contained within the limits of Furphy's completion, on 4 April 1897, of the manuscript version of *Such is Life* and the death of the author on 13 September 1912. The aim is to demonstrate the material and textual relationships between the extant documents and to identify the gallery of participants in Furphy's revision. This will assist our understanding of the evolution of the work as it was revised and re-purposed to secure publication and to establish a literary reputation under changing critical and commercial conditions. The following pages provide an outline of the major events that affected Furphy's creative process during this period, preparing the ground for a closer examination of the extant documents and a proposal for a scholarly edition in subsequent sections of the article.

Furphy was fifty years old when he began writing the sketches that would grow and merge to become the first version of *Such is Life*, a lost manuscript completed sometime in 1895 (*Letters* 24). This version amounted to 1264 pages, but Furphy set about revising this, hoping to complete the clean copy by the Spring of 1896 so that his 'next trip to Melbourne will be to get insulted by some publisher' (*Letters* 25). It is not recorded whether such an insult was received, but Furphy's revision had reduced the size of the manuscript to 1125 pages, less than it would take to contain Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* or George Eliot's *Romola*, according to Furphy's calculations (*Letters* 29). It was this version that Furphy described to J. F. Archibald, editor of the *Sydney Bulletin*, on 4 April 1897. Two months later, Furphy received the 'greatest surprise' of his

life when he received a reply from the *Bulletin* literary editor, A. G. Stephens (*Letters* 36). After receiving the manuscript, Stephens responded with an assessment in his role as a literary agent, flattering Furphy by saying *Such is Life* was ‘fitted to become an Australian classic, or semi-classic, since it embalms accurate representations of our character and customs, life and scenery, which, in such skilled and methodical forms, occur in no other book I know’ (*OT* 252). If Furphy wanted validation for his years of devotion to his literary project, recognition from one of Australia’s premier literary critics must have been intensely satisfying.

To take a chance on such a proposition Stephens estimated that a publisher would have to invest £400, which was a significant risk to any publisher considering an unknown author with a ‘trifle long-winded’ novel. Stephens gave Furphy several options to think about: send the novel to a London publisher; divide ‘the book into two or three sections, and [fire] them off one at a time’; or take a greater responsibility for the risk by contributing cash or guaranteeing sales (*OT* 254). Furphy responded within a week, thanking Stephens for his time, but clearly stating his position in relation to Stephens’ suggestions. He would not consider English publication: ‘Aut Australia aut nihil’. Division into parts could not be achieved without damage: ‘The irregular entanglement of incident seems to fix the book, for better or worse, as a unit’. And any responsibility for the risk was impossible: ‘My normal condition is stone broke. ... So the publisher must of necessity stand the racket, and recoup himself the very best way he can’ (*Letters* 30). With this in mind, Furphy offered his own suggestion, indicating his willingness to accept editing if it would secure publication: ‘If you *can* find a victim, I would suggest that you re-read MS., ruthlessly drawing your blue pencil across every sentence, par or page which offends your literary judgment, and re-mail to me’ (*Letters* 30-31).

Stephens quickly responded to Furphy’s suggestion with further instruction on the commercial realities of literary production. Seeking to move Furphy’s manuscript closer to publication, Stephens recommended typed copy because revision in manuscript would be difficult and expensive if he were commissioned to do so (*OT* 258). Furphy admitted that had he been better informed ‘the MS. Would have reached [Stephens] in type, and with every possible emendation already carried out,—such as the excision of certain high-falutin’ passages, the pruning of Sterne-like palaver, the condensation and reinforcement of argument, and the simplification of goaks [jokes]’ (*Letters* 32). Furphy was reluctant to

send his revised manuscript to a Melbourne typist and see his use of dialect corrected: ‘In fact, I wouldn’t trust any typist to transcribe dialect unless I was standing over sim [him] with a stick’ (*Letters* 35). But after finding only two typewriters in Shepparton, he decided to purchase a machine for the purpose of producing typed copy, and began the task himself in July 1897. (See fig. 1) It would take him more than twelve months to complete the job.



Fig. 1 Joseph Furphy’s typewriter at Tom Collins House, Perth.

Furphy announced on 11 July 1898 that the typescript was ready for inspection (*Letters* 43). He reported that, ‘The work is considerably altered from the written copy, and certainly not for the worse—in some cases, a couple of pages struck out, and replaced by a paragraph; in other cases, a few sentences interpolated for the sake of lucidity. But I bore in mind your judgment, as expressed upon reading MS’ (*Letters* 44). But despite Furphy’s significant revision and correction of the version that had attracted Stephens’ attention, publication was still not guaranteed. The financial risk of publication remained a barrier.

Stephens reported that, ‘Archibald smelt the book and did not like it—too long and too slow: Macleod was content to take Archibald’s opinion’ (*OT* 276-77). Nevertheless, Furphy was offered a publishing contract on 15 November 1899.¹ Furphy signed the agreement, but soon learned that such documents are no guarantee of expedited publication or remuneration.

In the last weeks of 1899, Furphy took the promise of his contract to reassert some authority over the future of his novel. He accepted the criticism that his novel was too long, but emphasised ‘it is already chastened down to the fineness of a greyhound. I don’t think there is any superfluous par’ (*Letters* 53). Furphy admitted that the ‘reflections’ were a possible target for excision, but he further stated that ‘still I think—and, from a literary point of view, you will agree with me—that further excision of these reflections, gay or grave, would emasculate the work, as a whole. I’m thinking of the fellows that will have to read it, and who will naturally want their 5 bob’s worth’ (*Letters* 53). Furphy’s sense of his audience was based on the commentary of friends, family and Stephens. But this sense of audience would be challenged by his publisher’s delay in production, influencing him to make choices in the future that he did not want to make at the end of 1899.

The year 1900 left little news of *Such is Life* in Furphy’s correspondence except for a few comments to William Cathels and a Boxing Day enquiry to Stephens. Furphy’s letter to Stephens proposed further revision given the delay and uncertainty of publication. Sorting through ‘a fragmentary duplicate of the written copy’ he saw ‘here and there a literary awkwardness, there an incongruity of character, in another place a scientific solecism, or a goak run to death. And one of my troubles now is that a due revision of the proof sheets would entail much extra work on the intelligent comp’ (*Letters* 56). Furphy repeated his plans for revision in a letter to Kate Baker written the same day, indicating that the apparent reluctance of the publisher to publish caused Furphy to accept the need to shorten the text because of ‘first, the unfortunate and incurable acreage of the work itself, and next, the present, or late, depression of the literary market’ (*Letters* 56), explanations already received from Stephens on a number of occasions. Furphy’s suggestion that the ‘acreage of the work itself’ was ‘incurable’ suggests that if *Such is Life* went into production at the beginning of 1901, we would have a much longer version of *Such is Life* than the one with which we are familiar.

Furphy wrote to both Stephens and William Macleod in the New Year, enquiring about the state of production and continuing to propose revision (*Letters* 58-59). Further silence from the *Bulletin* drove Furphy to arrange a trip to Sydney in order to visit the publisher's offices, a visit completed by the end of April 1901. The visit included lunch with Archibald, tea with Stephens and 'a long evening' with a large number of prominent *Bulletin* writers. Julian Croft argues that these meetings with 'the boys' of the *Bulletin* provided Furphy with a clearer sense of his audience, and it was these imagined readers who influenced his revisions (Croft 61-62). According to Furphy, 'The *Bulletin* people tearfully offered to print the book at once, though they shuddered at its size' (*Letters* 63). Responding to a face-to-face explanation of the financial risks and the suggestion that a shorter book would be 'perfect', Furphy exclaimed, "'I'll shorten the beggar down to any size you like; and trust me to serve up the scraps in some other form'" (*Letters* 64). Furphy must also have retrieved his typescript, because, travelling back to Melbourne by ship, he had planned out his method of attack before he got home. Writing to Stephens at the end of April 1901, after his return to Shepparton, Furphy reported:

As we agreed, contraction is impossible; the operation must be performed as if you would cut an ocean liner in two, then take a portion out of the centre, and deftly stick the ends together, making a tight, seaworthy brig. (*Letters* 62)

Furphy had looked over his seven-chapter novel and decided that the only option was to substitute a newly written short chapter for the long chapter five, 'thus disposing of about 100 pages, which will serve as a nucleus for future fabrication' (*Letters* 62). But these plans were extended to the second chapter two weeks later (See fig. 2). As we now know, those two chapters eventually became *The Buln-buln and the Brolga* and *Rigby's Romance*.

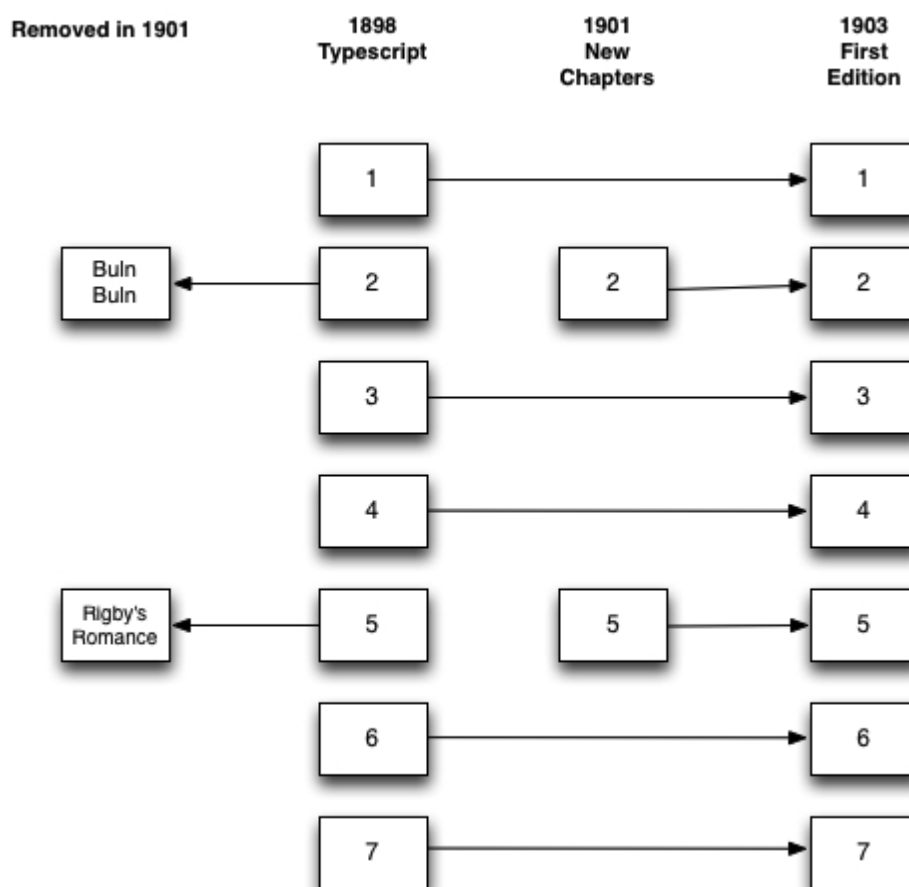


Fig. 2 Major Transmission of Text from the 1898 Typescript.

Furphy took almost six months to perform the operation described to Stephens. On 1 May he told Harry Baker that he was ‘desperately employed in cutting up my book to suit the Bulletin Co.; and though I am always most content when rushed with mental work, I find this job too much like pulling down a house and rebuilding a skillion’ (*Letters* 65). On Stephens’ request, Furphy began sending portions of typescript and by 18 September he had delivered the first five chapters. The next chapter followed on 8 October, and the final chapter left Shepparton on 18 October, ‘thus shifting incidence of Moral Responsibility to BULLETIN, and giving self a chance to fabricate something fresh’ (*Letters* 72-73). He wrote to Kate Baker on the same night, confessing that ‘I’ve lost all interest in S. is L. ... My solicitude is centred on Rigby’s Romance’ (*Letters* 75). Shifting his attention to *Rigby’s Romance*, and shifting ‘Moral Responsibility’ for *Such is Life* to Stephens and the Bulletin, Furphy appears to have completely acquiesced to the demands of publication. This explains his acceptance of the majority of Stephens’ editorial suggestions that came by post in the months that followed.

Furphy's acquiescence was consolidated a month later when he received a letter from Stephens, reminding him of the stake the Bulletin had wagered on the publication of *Such is Life*. The size of the novel remained a concern and the state of the book trade made the publisher nervous (*OT* 297). Stephens warned Furphy that he should expect no financial reward for his work. Furphy replied on 26 November, assuring Stephens that he had 'never anticipated any pecuniary profit' (*Letters* 76-77). For almost six years, Furphy had lived with uncertainty about the public fate of his 'magnum opus'. He had reconceived the length and structure of his narrative in response to the demands of a publisher which itself was responding to the conditions of the marketplace. The typescript that lay on Stephens' desk was the product of this drawn out period of negotiation and it was this typescript that compositors at the Bulletin received just before Christmas 1901. Furphy's 'magnum opus' was about to be transformed into print.

The first set of proofs arrived in Shepparton on 2 January 1902, and Furphy spent the next twelve months attending to these and accompanying queries from Stephens and others. Correspondence with Stephens and another Bulletin editor, Alex Montgomery, contains discussion about hyphenation, word-usage and style, most of which Furphy left to the editor's discretion. Furphy had reached page 217 of the Bulletin edition by 9 February 1902, and sent a page of corrections and explanations the following day (*Letters* 90-91). Furphy sent a similar list in March, sometime before Stephens left Australia on a trip to Europe and passed on his editorial duties to Alex Montgomery. Furphy courteously responded to his queries and efficiently corrected galley proofs when they arrived.² Montgomery requested 'a little bit of an introduction—something, say, to disclaim any attempt at connected narrative—or in fact whatever you please' (*OT* 304). Furphy duly produced the introduction, but heard little from the publisher until 1903 when he made the final corrections to proofs sometime in January (*Letters* 109).

This was the last opportunity for authorial change to the work that had emerged in Furphy's imagination early in the 1890s and evolved through manuscript, typescript and galley proof versions until the demands of the financial stakeholders were satisfied. Furphy received a copy of *Such is Life* on 8 April 1903, but publication was further delayed. At the end of June, Furphy received three more copies and the news from Stephens that 2000 copies had been printed and 500 bound for the market (*OT* 310). Those five hundred bound copies were soon moving towards booksellers across Australia. *Such is Life* was published

on 1 August 1903 and Furphy could finally claim the status of a published author, albeit behind the name of his nom de plume, Tom Collins.

Recycling the Typescript

Furphy's work on his 1890s texts was not finished because of his shift in interest from *Such is Life* to those chapters that were once a prominent feature of his novel's narrative structure. Probably smarting from the criticism of his work and its unsuitability for profitable publication, he was determined to make *Rigby's Romance* a much better novel than *Such is Life*. By the time *Such is Life* was published, *Rigby's Romance* was ready for submission and Furphy was once again seeking a publisher. A. G. Stephens was informed of its existence on 30 June 1903, and Furphy was describing expansion rather than the reduction of his work (*Letters* 115). Furphy had high hopes for *Rigby's Romance*, describing *Such is Life* 'only as a preliminary canter—a sighting shot' (*Letters* 133) for the work that occupied his time at the end of 1903. Furphy's personal philosophy, perhaps spurred by his experience with *Such is Life*, had forced him to accept a role as a struggling artist-philosopher working in conflict with the marketplace. He described his position to Cecil Winter:

As to ultimate profit, that is the "B's" business, not mine; the "B." is a business man, and I am a philosopher. If I die worth a tenner, outside my typewriter and a few books, I must regard myself as an imposter. ... It is certain that no man can do his best work as author, inventor, artist, or in any creative capacity, if he keeps the dollar in perspective. (*Letters* 134)

Furphy should not have been surprised, then, when the Bulletin declined *Rigby's Romance* while still waiting for *Such is Life* to repay the publisher's investment.²

Furphy moved to Perth in 1905 to join his sons who had established an iron foundry, and it is there that he continued negotiations with publishers about the works that he had extracted from the 1898 version of *Such is Life*. Rejected by the *Western Mail*, a West Australian weekly, Furphy subsequently offered the novel to the Melbourne *Tocsin* and the Sydney *Worker* with the same result before he succeeded in capturing the attention of Robert Ross, editor of Broken Hill's *Barrier Truth* newspaper, who agreed to serialise the

novel (*Letters* 207). By this time, Furphy had given up on asking for payment, telling Miles Franklin that he ‘was willing to put it in the plate of Democracy as a contribution’ (*Letters* 207). The serialisation of *Rigby’s Romance* appeared weekly in the *Barrier Truth* from 20 October 1905 to 20 July 1906.

Furphy died before any of his long works of fiction were published again. *The Buln-buln and the Brolga* was offered to the *Barrier Truth*, but it was not published and only existed in typescript form during Furphy’s lifetime. The Melbourne publishers George Robertson and T. C. Lothian both rejected *Rigby’s Romance* in May 1907 and Furphy was resigned to the fact that he would not see these works in print. The relationship between the works and their author had stabilised, manifested in the material that Furphy’s family, friends and publishing associates preserved. Collected in archives and special collections across Australia, this material, combined with correspondence and reviews, remains the only record of Furphy’s career as an author. Like the chapters of *Such is Life*, they are a loosely federated collection of material that requires close examination to understand the documents’ role in the textual and material history of *Such is Life*.

Archival Remnants

Rarely, if ever, does the production of a literary work leave a complete record of the events in correspondence, manuscripts, proofs and other publishing records. *Such is Life* is no exception. Therefore, it is important to locate and describe what is available for study in order to participate in fully informed discussions about the work as a material, cultural and literary object. The following pages provide a census of the extant material objects which scholars and critics can use to support their arguments about *Such is Life*.

Manuscript

The manuscript delivered to A. G. Stephens on 2 May 1897 amounted to 1125 pages. Of those, 56 pages are preserved in the Miles Franklin Papers in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. It is possible that more fragments exist in similar collections, but if so they are yet to be identified. Furphy’s habit of recycling paper for correspondence adds several pages to the extant manuscript. For instance, a letter to Miles Franklin, dated 27 March 1904 was typed on the back of a page of manuscript number ‘1021’ (*Letters* 154-55). In addition,

several manuscript pages relating to *Such is Life* and *Rigby's Romance* are held at Tom Collins House in Perth, pasted to a display board (See Fig. 3). Because of its fragmentation, the scope of the first complete versions of *Such is Life* can only be guessed at through their relationship to corresponding sections of the extant typescript and to Furphy's descriptions in his correspondence.

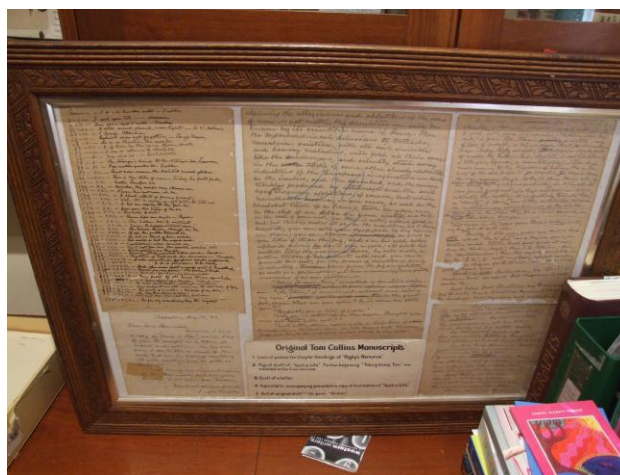


Fig. 3 Joseph Furphy artefacts on display at Tom Collins House, Perth.

Typescript

The typescript sent to A. G. Stephens in July 1898 amounted to 644 pages, of which 403 are preserved in the Miles Franklin Papers at the Mitchell Library in Sydney. This includes the majority of chapter one, about half of chapter two which was repurposed in 1901 to become *The Buln-buln and the Brolga*, the first 23 pages of chapter three, the majority of chapter five which was re-purposed in 1901 to become *Rigby's Romance*, and all of chapters six and seven. The largest gaps in the document are therefore found in chapters two, three and four. Like the manuscript, some typescript pages were recycled for correspondence (*Letters* 154-55). Except for several fragments, a typescript for *Rigby's Romance* has not been located, but Furphy's hand-sewn typescript of *The Buln-buln and the Brolga* is located in the Lloyd Ross Papers in the National Library of Australia (MS3939, Box 116, Folder 2). A typescript of *Rigby's Romance* is located in the Bernard O'Dowd Papers at the State Library of Victoria, but it is unlikely to have been produced during Furphy's lifetime, and was definitely not typed on Furphy's Franklin typewriter.

Print and other fragments

The main print versions are the Bulletin Publishing Company first edition, the *Barrier Truth* serialisation of *Rigby's Romance*, and 'O'Flaherty's Troubles', a sketch that was removed from the 1898 typescript and published in the *Bulletin* on 25 January 1902. Fragments of these publications exist, including a collection of *Rigby's Romance* instalments pasted into a ledger book, and several pages of proofs that include the correcting hand of both Furphy and Stephens. In addition, Furphy occasionally quoted from his works-in-progress in his correspondence, sometimes producing page-long versions of passages from *Rigby's Romance*.

Towards an Electronic Edition of *Such is Life*

Although we are blessed with annotated editions of *Such is Life*, *The Buln-buln and the Brolga*, and soon *Rigby's Romance*, none of these editions has attempted to assess the authority of the various texts, fragmentary or complete, as representatives of their respective works. The annotated editions have done an exemplary job of providing explanatory notes to help readers understand literary allusions and historical context, but there is little to guide the readers into the complexity of the processes that brought those texts into existence. A good scholarly edition should provide the best guide to the work, allowing readers to come much closer to the work than they would under normal circumstances.

As Peter Shillingsburg says in his edition of Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, most editors now accept that 'there is no universally prescribed way to edit,' but only opportunities for editors to construct guides to the work backed by an editorial rationale and their selection of material (in Thackeray 1996). The contingency of biographical information and its relationship to the materials produced through the writer's activities forms a field where ideas of author and ideas of document, text and work are constantly shifting. The slipperiness of that biographical subject, the author, is best summed up by James L West III who emphasises the role of the editor in the construction of knowledge: 'It is all a matter of language, of choosing a particular set of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that will construct, as a biographer would, the author necessary to justify the editorial approach' (West, 8). This is particularly pertinent when the editor aims to establish a text according

to some idea of textual authority; or if the editor aims to capture the author's final intentions and, in doing so, reverses any changes deemed to be non-authorial. Such an enterprise can be highly subjective, leading to the situation where two different editors could establish two very different 'authoritative' texts from the same material.

The contingency of the biographical subject is matched by the conditions under which the archive of artefacts has been assembled. James L West III offers good advice on this as well. Arguing that editors must construct a narrative to 'make the archives talk' if they are to convince readers of the validity of their arguments and their edition, West outlines the basic tasks required:

The editor must examine the surviving notes, manuscripts, typescripts, proofs, and other evidence. The editor must also read the relevant letters and journals and study the publishers' records and account books. From these materials an account of the composition of the work can be fashioned. The narrative will be assembled from the evidence that is otherwise inert. One does not 'allow' the archives to talk; one 'makes' them talk, crafting stories in the same way that biographers and historians do, by selecting and arranging the evidence and writing a story that ties the whole together. (West 2)

One does not have to read too far into critiques of archival practice by the likes of Derrida and Foucault to have any thoughts of objective knowledge dashed by their assessment of human subjectivities at play in archival preservation, disposal and description. The narratives that emerge from analyses of biographical and historical records are, by their nature, fragmented, and skewed toward particular ideas of value. In effect, a scholarly edition with a critically established reading text, apparatus of variants, textual notes and an essay on the text 'is not something that unproblematically stands in for the work in a newly purified or clarified form'. Rather, it 'should be seen as the embodiment of an argument' about the work, one perspective of the work among many legitimate alternatives (Eggert 2012, 173).

Today, only the bravest, or most foolhardy scholarly editor would claim to have produced a definitive edition that need never be done again. The contingencies of the biographical subject and archival collections are further destabilised by the conceptual complexity of

terms such as document, text, and work, increasing the challenges faced by editors attempting to produce the best guide to a literary work that they possibly can. A number of editorial theorists have shifted attention away from the products of literary endeavour to the processes that join those products together, demonstrating that no one material object can ever contain the *work* because of the need for human activity to turn the material into text through reading. As Paul Eggert has argued, the concept of the ‘work’:

operates as a regulative idea that immediately dissolves, in reading, into the negative dialectic of document and text. Seen as a regulative idea, the ‘work’ retains its function as a pragmatic agreement for organising our remembered experiences of reading documents that are closely related bibliographically. (Eggert 2009, 235)

With such contingencies in mind, contemplating an edition of *Such is Life* necessarily draws attention to the relationship between the ‘work’ that we know as *Such is Life* and the documents that represent it to readers. This is further complicated by intersections with other ‘works’ such as *Rigby’s Romance*, *The Buln-buln and the Brolga* and ‘O’Flaherty’s Troubles’, and the documents that represent those works to readers. We should always remember that such representation always occurs to *someone* (editor, reader, historian, archivist) under certain spatial, temporal, and ideological conditions. With such a complex network of material, textual and biographical ideas, editorial strategies necessarily turn to electronic representation as the most appropriate medium for modelling the material that we know exists and the constantly changing ways we talk to each other about the material and the agency underlying and therefore explaining the textual variation between that material.

So, what to do with *Such is Life*? After careful consideration of the variation between the 1898 typescript and the printed editions, enough evidence can be found to ‘correct’ each published version so that Furphy’s method of punctuation and spacing is followed and that any flagrant errors of transmission can be detected and removed from any new printed editions. But what of Furphy’s constantly changing attitude to the commercial pressures to revise over a three-year period? Can they be reversed? And should they be? The evidence of Furphy’s acquiescence given above allows one to argue that the first edition of *Such is Life* met his desires and expectations for the public form of his work. One could counter

that argument with his regular suggestions in correspondence that contraction and revision could not be achieved without destroying his artistic vision. Critics have argued that Furphy's revisions produced a 'better' text, while others have pointed to the losses that resulted: For example Croft sees the revision as improvement (62-74), but, by contrast, Michael Wilding argues, 'The omission of the socialist core of Furphy's vision from the text of *Such is Life* is one of the great scandals of Australian literature' (Wilding, 120-21).

Pursuit of an ur-version of *Such is Life* will potentially draw detractors who point to the fragmented nature of the archive and say that reconstruction is impossible because of the uncertainty that surrounds the nature of the material gaps. But uncertainty and contingency are in the nature of things that are written and transformed into print. Some sort of change is inevitable, and error is likely. The editor of a scholarly edition has to face up to the questions.

The first step is to devise a way of representing the archive and the complex network of relationships between artefacts and people. This can scarcely be done in print, but an electronic edition of *Such is Life*, open and open-ended, can, in principle, accommodate the contingency of text. The practicality of the idea has lately come clear as part of the development of infrastructure in the Australian Electronic Scholarly Editing project (<http://austese.net/>). The thought that has gone into the ontology, the architecture of the database, the project workflow, and the integration of tools has been informed, in part, by the requirements of a proposal to edit *Such is Life* in electronic form (See fig. 4). It is hoped that the Joseph Furphy Archive will provide greater access to the artefacts that inform our understanding of the author and his works, and will accommodate a greater level of interactivity by supporting collaborative interpretation through a secure annotation service.

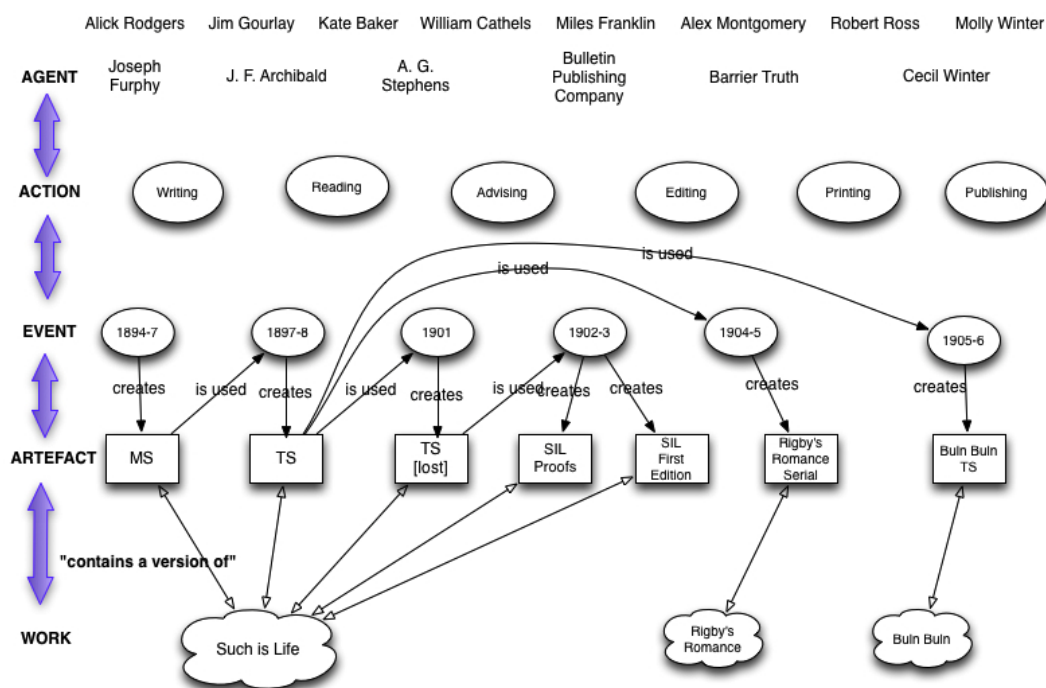


Fig. 4 A sample of the objects and relationships in the Joseph Furphy Archive.

Digital images of original documents and transcriptions of the text carried by those documents form the foundation of the archive. Supported by a collation program that displays the textual variation between artefacts in side-by-side and table views, readers will be able to trace the evolution of the text as it changed in composition, revision and publication. Initially, readers will be guided through the revisions by editorial ‘revision narratives’ in the form of annotations that identify and describe the primary trends in Furphy’s work across his documents. But they will also have the opportunity to reply to such annotations and create their own with a secure annotation tool that supports solitary and collaborative interpretation. Cumulatively, these annotations will support differing and, perhaps, conflicting views of the work.

Such infrastructure satisfies archival impulses and opens up the archive to commentary about the historical, material and textual aspects of the works in question. But the editorial impulse can only be fully satisfied by an argument that draws attention to a particular way of looking at the work through the critical establishment of a reading text. As a stimulus to the accumulating commentary, the Joseph Furphy Archive will include a speculative reconstruction of the text of the 1898 typescript that draws on the text of the first edition and typescript of *The Buln-buln and the Brolga* to fill the gaps in chapters two, three, and

four of the 1898 typescript. Because of the light revisions that Furphy made to chapters six and seven and because a number of critics have argued that chapters three and four were likely to have been revised in a similar way (Croft 69), such a manoeuvre, reversing Furphy's revision conducted in 1901, will inevitably incorporate a significant percentage of the text carried by Furphy's typescript when it was sent to A. G. Stephens in 1898. Any passages taken from the printed versions judged to be probable revisions, because of linked material in other sections of the typescript, or because of suggestions made previously by scholars, will be annotated with a prominent revision narrative that explains its presence in the reconstruction. This edition, I believe, will contribute to our understanding of *Such is Life* by drawing attention to the contingencies of literary production and the role in these processes of readers, critics, scholars and editors—to the fluid nature of text (Bryant 2002), and not a misleading sense of textual stability.

An online, networked environment such as this will avoid the 'closed, look but don't touch' nature of an alternative, print-bound edition by opening up the archive to user contributions and by exposing to scrutiny the editorial work within the archive. Hans Walter Gabler has recently described the emergence of a new generation of electronic editions as a 'paradigm of a relational interplay of discourses, dynamically correlated both among themselves and with an edition's reader and users: that is, to a paradigm once again of text and ongoing commentary' (Gabler 2010). Visitors to the Joseph Furphy Archive will be able to read text, material, and human activity in the contingencies that are represented on and across the pages of the archive. A. G. Stephens was wrong when he proclaimed that 'No one but the proof-readers will ever read *Such is Life* right through'. There is a rich tradition of reading from the past that can be engaged in commentaries written for the Joseph Furphy Archive. Of course, there will be many who do not read this challenging novel right through, but as an experiment in social reading, writing and editing, we have an opportunity to bring all of Furphy's works to life in a democratic spirit of which I hope he would approve.

NOTES

¹ This contract is transcribed and described by Brian Dibble, 'Joseph Furphy's 1899 Contract for *Such Is Life*—A Publishing Miracle: 30 percent royalty on 1000 copies,' *Australian Author* (December 1986), 14.

² Furphy described the galley proofs to William Cathels: 'I get the proofs in "galleys", as long as your arm; each batch containing 16 pages; . . . They average one every 8 days, or six weeks, according as the "B." breaks out or sobers up.' (*Letters* 101)

³ For the sales figures of *Such is Life*, see Barnes 1955.

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